

AN
ESSAY
ON
CRITICISM.

WRITTEN
IN THE YEAR MDCCIX.
BY
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H A L L E

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IS hard to say, if greater want of skill
Appear in writing or in judging ill?
But of the two, less dang'rous is th' offence
To tire our patience, than mislead our sense.
Some few in that, but numbers err in this,
Ten censure wrong for one who writes amiss;
A fool might once himself alone expose,
Now one in verse makes many more in prose.
'Tis with our judgments as our watches, none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own.
In Poets as true genius is but rare,
True Taste as seldom is the Critic's share;
Both must alike from Heav'n derive their light,
These born to judge, as well as those to write.
Let such teach others who themselves excel,

And censure freely who have written well.

Authors are partial to their wit, 'tis true,

But are not Critics to their judgment too?

Yet if we look more closely, we shall find

Most have the seeds of judgment in their mind: 20

Nature affords at least a glimm'ring light;

The lines, tho'touch'd but faintly, are drawn right.

But as the flightest sketch, if justly trac'd,

Is by ill-colouring but the more disgrac'd,

So by false learning is good sense defac'd: }

Some are bewilder'd in the maze of schools, 26

And some made coxcombs Nature meant but fools.

In search of wit these lose their common sense,

And then turn Critics in their own defence:

Each burns alike, who can, or cannot write, 30

Or with a Rival's, or an Eunuch's spite.

All fools have still an itching to deride,

And fain would be upon the laughing side.

If Mævius scribble in Apollo's spight,

There are, who judge still worse than he can write.

Some have at first for Wits, then Poets past, 36

Turn'd Critics next, and prov'd plain fools at last.

Some neither can for Wits nor Critics pass,

As heavy mules are neither horse nor ass.

Those half learn'd wittlings, num'rous in our isle,

As half-form'd insects on the banks of Nile; 41

Unfinish'd things, one knows not what to call,

Their generation's so equivocal:

To tell'em, would a hundred tongues require,

Or one vain wit's, that might a hundred tire. 45

But

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But you who seek to give and merit fame,
And justly bear a Critic's noble name,
Before yourself and your own reach to know,
How far your genius, taste, and learning go;
Launch not beyond your depth, but be discreet, 50
And mark that point where sense and dulness meet.

Nature to all things fix'd the limits fit,
And wisely curb'd proud man's pretending wit.
As on the land while here the ocean gains,
In other parts it leaves wide sandy plains: 55
Thus in the soul while memory prevails,
The solid pow'r of understanding fails;
Where beams of warm imagination play,
The memory's soft figures melt away.

One science only will one genius fit; 60
So vast is art, so narrow human wit:
Not only bounded to peculiar arts,
But oft in those confin'd to single parts.

Like Kings we lose the conquests gain'd before,
By vain ambition still to make them more: 65
Each might his sev'ral province well command,
Would all but stoop to what they understand,

First follow Nature, and your judgment frame
By her just standard, which is still the same:
Unerring NATURE, still divinely bright, 70
One clear, unchang'd, and universal light,
Life, force, and beauty, must to all impart,
At once the source, and end, and test of Art.
Art from that fund each just supply provides;
Works without show, and without pomp presides: 75

In some fair body thus th'informing soul 76
 With spirits feeds, with vigour fills the whole,
 Each motion guides, and ev'ry nerve sustains;
 Itself unseen, but in th' effects remains.

Some, to whom Heav'n in wit has been profuse, 80
 Want as much more, to turn it to it's use;
 For wit and judgment often are at strife,
 Tho' meant each other's aid, like man and wife.
 'Tis more to guide, than spur the Muse's steed;
 Restrain his fury, than provoke his speed; 85
 The winged courser, like a gen'rous horse,
 Shows most true mettle when you check his course.

Those RULES of old discover'd, not devis'd,
 Are Nature still, but Nature methodiz'd;
 Nature, like Liberty, is but restrain'd 90
 By the same Laws which first herself ordain'd.

Hear how learn'd Greece her useful rules indites,
 When to repress, and when indulge our flights:
 High on Parnassus' top her sons she show'd,
 And pointed out those arduous paths they trod; 95
 Held from afar, aloft, th' immortal prize,
 And urg'd the rest by equal steps to rise.

Just precepts thus from great examples giv'n,
 She drew from them what they deriv'd from Heav'n.
 The gen'rous Critic fann'd the Poet's fire, 100
 And taught the world with Reason to admire.

Then Criticism the Muses' handmaid prov'd,
 To dress her charms, and make her more belov'd:
 But following wits from that intention stray'd,
 Who could not win the mistress, woo'd the maid;

Against

Against the Poets their own arms they turn'd,
 Sure to hate most the men from whom they learn'd.
 So modern 'Pothecaries, taught the art
 By Doctor's bills to play the Doctor's part,
 Bold in the practice of mistaken rules, 110
 Prescribe, apply, and call their masters fools.

Some on the leaves of antient authors prey,
 Nor time nor moths e'er spoil'd so much as they.
 Some drily plain, without invention's aid,
 Write dull receipt, how poems may be made, 115
 These leave the sense, their learning to display,
 And those explain the meaning quite away.

You then whose judgment the right course would steer,
 Know well each ANCIENT's proper character;
 His Fable, Subject, scope in ev'ry Page; 120
 Religion, Country, genius of his Age:
 Without all these at once before your eyes,
 Cavil you may, but never criticize.

Be Homer's works your study and delight,
 Read them by day, and meditate by night; 125
 Thence form your judgment, thence your maxims bring,
 And trace the Muses upward to their spring.

Still with itself compar'd, his text peruse;
 And led your comment be the Mantuan Muse.

When first young Maro in his boundless mind
 A work t'outlast immortal Rome design'd, 131
 Perhaps he seem'd above the Critic's law,
 And but from Nature's fountains scorn'd to draw:
 But when t' examine ev'ry part he came,
 Nature and Homer were, he found, the same.

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Convinc'd, amaz'd, he checks the bold design;
 And rules as strict his labour'd work confine,
 As if the Stagirite o'erlook'd each line.
 Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem;
 To copy nature is to copy them. 140

Some beauties yet no Precepts can declare,
 For there's a happiness as well as care.
 Music resembles Poetry, in each
 Are nameless graces which no methods teach,
 And which a master-hand alone can reach. 145

If, where the rules not far enough extend,
 (Since rules were made but to promote their end)

Some lucky licence answer to the full
 Th' intent propos'd, that Licence is a rule,

Thus Pegasus, a nearer way to take,
 May boldly deviate from the common track; 150

From vulgar bounds with brave disorder part,
 And snatch a grace beyond the reach of art,

Which without passing thro' the judgment, gains
 The heart, and all its end at once attains. 155

In prospects thus, some objects please our eyes,
 Which out of nature's common order rise,

The shapeless rock, or hanging precipice.
 Great Wits sometimes may gloriously offend,

And rise to faults true Critics dare not mend. 160
 But tho' the Ancients thus their rules invade,

(As Kings dispense with laws themselves have made)
 Moderns, beware! or if you must offend

Against the precept, ne'er transgress it's End;
 Let it be seldom, and compell'd by need; 165

And

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And have, at least, their precedent to plead,
The Critic else proceeds without remorse,
Seizes your fame, and puts his laws in force.

I know there are, to whose presumptuous thoughts
Those freer beauties, ev'n in them, seem faults.
Some figures monstrous and mis-shap'd appear,
Consider'd singly, or beheld too near,
Which, but proportion'd to their light, or place,
Due distance reconciles to form and grace.
A prudent chief not always must display
His pow'rs in equal ranks, and fair array,
But with th' occasion and the place comply,
Conceal his force, nay seem sometimes to fly.
Those oft are stratagems which errors seem,
Nor is it Homer nods, but we that dream.

Still green with bays each ancient Altar stands,
Above the reach of sacrilegious hands;
Secure from Flames, from Envy's fiercer rage,
Destructive War, and all involving Age.
See from each clime the learn'd their incense bring!
Hear, in all tongues consenting Praises ring!
In praise so just let ev'ry voice be join'd,
And fill the gen'ral chorus of mankind.
Hail, Bards triumphant! born in happier days;
Immortal heirs of universal praise!
Whose honours with increase of ages grow,
As streams roll down, enlarging as they flow;
Nations unborn your mighty names shall sound,
And worlds applaud that must not yet be found!
O may some spark of your celestial fire,

The last, the meanest of your sons inspire.
 (That on weak wings, from far, pursues your flights;
 Glows while he reads, but trembles as he writes)
 To teach vain Wits a science little known,
 T'admire superior sense, and doubt their own! 200

Of all the causes which conspire to blind
 Man's erring judgment, and misguide the mind,
 What the weak head with strongest bias rules,
 Is *Pride*, the never-failing vice of fools.
 Whatever Nature has in worth deny'd, 205
 She gives in large recruits of needful *Pride*;
 For as in bodies, thus in souls, we find
 What wants in blood and spirits, swell'd with wind:
Pride, where Wit fails, steps in to our defence,
 And fills up all the mighty Void of sense. 210
 If once right reason drives that cloud away,
 Truth breaks upon us with resistless day.
 Trust not yourself; but your defects to know,
 Make use of every friend——and ev'ry foe.

A little learning is a dang'rous thing; 215
 Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring:
 There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
 And drinking largely sobers us again.
 Fir'd at first sight with what the Muse imparts,
 In fearless youth we tempt the heights of Arts, 220
 While from the bounded level of our mind,
 Short views we take, nor see the lengths behind;
 But more advanc'd, behold with strange surprize
 New distant scenes of endless science rise!
 So pleas'd at first the tow'ring Alps we try, 225

Mount

Mount o'er the vales, and seem to tread the sky,
Th' eternal snows appear already past,
And the first clouds and mountains seem the last:
But, those attain'd, we tremble to survey
The growing labours of the lengthen'd way,
Th' increasing prospect tires our wand'ring eyes,
Hills peep o'er hills, and Alps on Alps arise!

A perfect Judge will read each work of Wit
With the same spirit that it's author writ:
Survey the WHOLE, nor seek slight faults to find;
Where nature moves, and rapture warms the mind;
Nor lose for that malignant dull delight,
The gen'rous pleasure to be charm'd with wit.
But in such lays as neither ebb nor flow,
Correctly cold and regularly low,
That shunning faults, one quiet tenour keep;
We cannot blame indeed --- but we may sleep.
In Wit, as Nature, what affects our hearts
Is not th' exactness of peculiar parts;
'Tis not a lip, or eye, we beauty call,
But the joint force and full result of all.
Thus when we view some well-proportion'd dome,
(The world's just wonder, and ev'n thine, O Rome!)
No single parts unequally surprize,
All comes united to the admiring eyes;
No monstrous height, or breadth, or length appear;
The Whole at once is bold, and regular.
"Whoever thinks a faultless piece to see,
Thinks what ne'er was, nor is, nor e'er shall be.
In ev'ry work regard the writer's End,

*Nihil ex omni parte beatum
præsens est imperfectum, perfectum et plusquamperfectum
est futurum* Sin.

Since none can compass more than they intend;
 And if the means be just, the conduct true,
 Applause in spite of trivial faults, is due.
 As men of breeding, sometimes men of wit,
 To avoid great errors, must the less commit: 260
 Neglect the rules each verbal Critic lays,
 For not to know some trifles is a praise.
 Most Critics, fond of some subservient art,
 Still make the Whole depend upon a Part:
 They talk of principles, but notions prize, 265
 And all to one lov'd Folly sacrifice.

Once on a time, La Mancha's Knight, they say,
 A certain Bard encount'ring on the way,
 Discours'd in terms as just, with looks as sage,
 As e'er could Dennis, of the Grecian stage; 270
 Concluding all were desp'rate fots and fools,
 Who durst depart from Aristotle's rules.
 Our Author happy in a judge so nice,
 Produc'd his Play, and begg'd the Knight's advice;
 Made him observe the subject and the plot, 275
 The manners, passions, unities; what not?
 All which, exact to rule, were brought about,
 Were but a combat in the lists left out.
 "What leave the Combat out?" exclaims the Knight;
 "Yes, or we must renounce the Stagirite, 280
 "Not so by Heav'n" (he answers in a rage)
 "Knights, squires, and steeds, must enter on the stage."
 So vast a throng the stage can n'er contain.
 "Then build a new, or act it in a plain."

Thus Critics of less judgment than caprice, 285

Curious not knowing, not exact but nice,
Form fhort Ideas; and offend in arts
(As most in manners) by a love to parts.

Some to *Conceit* alone their taste confine,
And glit'ring thoughts struck out at ev'ry line; 290
Pleas'd with a work where nothing's just or fit;
One glaring Chaos and wild heap of wit.

Poets like painters, thus, unskill'd to trace
The naked nature and the living grace,
With gold and jewels cover ev'ry part, 295

And hide with ornaments their want of art.
True wit is Nature to advantage dress'd,
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd;
Something, whose truth convinc'd at sight we find,
That gives us back the image of our mind. 300

As shades more sweetly recommend the light,
So modest plainness sets off sprightly wit.
For works may have more wit than does'em good,
As bodies perish thro' excess of blood.

Others for *Language* all their care express, 305
And value books, as women men, for dress:
Their praise is still, — the Style is excellent;
The Sense, they humbly take upon content.

Words are like leaves; and where they most abound,
Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found: 310
False eloquence, like the prismatic glass,
It's gaudy colours spreads on ev'ry place;
The face of Nature we no more survey,
All glares alike, without distinction gay: 314

But

But true Expression, like th' unchanging sun,
Clears and improves whate'er it shines upon,
It gilds all objects, but it alters none.

Expression is the dress of thought, and still
Appears more decent, as more suitable;

A vile counceit in pompous words express'd 320

Is like a clown in regal purple dress'd:

For diff'rent styles with diff'rent subjects sort,

As sev'ral garbs with country, town, and court.

Some by old words to fame have made pretence,

Ancients in phrase, meer moderns in their sense;

Such labour'd nothings, in so strange a style, 326

Amaze th'unlearn'd, and make the learn'd smile.

Unlucky, as Fungoso in the Play,

These sparks with awkward vanity display

What the fine gentleman wore yesterday; 330

And but so mimic antient wits at best,

As apes our grandfathers, in their doublets drest.

In words, as fashions, the same rule will hold;

Alike fantastic, if too new, or old:

Be not the first by whom the new are try'd, 335

Nor yet the last to lay the old aside.

But most by Numbers judge a Poet's song,

And smooth or rough, with them, is right or wrong:

In the bright Muse tho' thousand charms conspire,

Her voice is all these tuneful fools admire; 340

Who haunt Parnassus but to please their ear,

Not mend their minds; as some to Church repair,

Not for the doctrine, but the music there.

These

These equal syllables alone require,
 Tho' of the ear the open vowels tire; 345
 While expletives their feeble aid do join;
 And ten low words oft creep in one dull line:
 While they ring round the same unvary'd chimes
 With sure returns of still expected rhymes;
 Where-e'er you find "the cooling western breeze,"
 In the next line, it "wispers thro' the trees:" 305
 In crystal streams "with pleasing murmurs creep,"
 The reader's threaten'd (not in vain) with "sleep:"
 Then at the last and only couplet fraught
 With some unmeaning thing they call a thought,
 A needless Alexandrine ends the song, 350
 That, like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along-
 Leave such to tune their own dull rhymes, and know
 What's roundly smooth, or languishingly flow;
 And praise the easy vigour of a line, 360
 Where Denham's strength, and Waller's sweetness join.
 True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,
 As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance.
 'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence,
 The sound must seem an Echo to the sense: 365
 Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,
 And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows;
 But when loud surges lash the sounding shoar,
 The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar.
 When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,
 The line too labours, and the words move slow:
 Not so, when swift Camilla scours the plain, 372
 Flies o'er th' unbending corn, and skims along the main-
 Hear

Hear how Timotheus' war *days* surprize,
And bid alternate passions fall and rise! 375

While at each change, the son of Libyan Jove
Now burns with glory, and then melts with love;
Now his fierce eyes with sparkling fury glow,
Now sighs steel out, and tears begin to flow:
Persians and Greeks like turns of nature found, 380
And the world's victor stood subdu'd by Sound!
The pow'r of Music all our hearts allow,
And what Timotheus was, is DRYDEN now.

Avoid Extremes; and shun the fault of such,
Who still are pleas'd too little or too much, 385
At ev'ry trifle scorn to take offence,
That always shews great pride, or little sense;
Those heads, as stomachs, are not sure the best,
Which nauseate all, and nothing can digest.
Yet let not each gay Turn thy rapture move; 390
For fools admire, but men of sense approve:
As things seem large which we thro' mist descry,
Dulness is ever apt to magnify.

Some foreign writers, some our own despise;
The Ancients only, or the moderns prize. 395
Thus Wit, like Faith, by each man is apply'd
To one small sect, and all are damn'd beside.

Meanly they seek the blessing to confine,
And force that sun but on a part to shine,
Which not alone the southern wit sublimes 400
But ripens spirits in cold northern climes;
Which from the first has shone on ages past;
Enlights the present, and shall warm the last;

Tho

Tho' each may feel encrease and decays,
And see now clearer and now darker days. 405
Regard not then if Wit be old or new,
But blame the false, and value still the true.

Some ne'er advance a Judgment of their own,
But catch the spreading notion of the Town;
They reason and conclude by precedent, 410
And own stale nonsense which they ne'er invent.
Some judge of authors names, not works, and then
Nor praise nor blame the writings, but the men.

Of all this servile herd, the worst is he
That in proud dulness joins with Quality. 415
A constant Critic at the great man's board,
To fetch and carry nonsense for my Lord.

What woful stuff this madrigal would be,
In some starv'd hackney sonneteer, or me?
But let a Lord once own the happy lines, 420
How the wit brightens! how the style refines:
Before his sacred name flies ev'ry fault,
And each exalted stanza teems with thought!

The Vulgar thus through Imitation err;
As oft the Learn'd by being singular; 425
So much they scorn the croud, that if the throng
By chance go right, they purposely go wrong:
So Schismatics the plain believers quit,
And are but damn'd for having too much wit,
Some praise at morning what they blame at night;
But always think the last opinion right. 431

A Muse by these is like a mistress us'd,
This hour she's idoliz'd, the next abus'd;

* *

While

While their weak heads like towns unfortify'd,
 'Twixt sense and nonsense daily change their side.
 Ask them the cause; the're wiser still they say;
 And still to-morrow's wiser than to-day.

We think our fathers fools; so wise we grow;
 Our wiser sons no doubt, will think us so. 439

Once School-divines this zealous isle o'erspread;
 Who knew most Sentences, was deepest read;
 Faith, Gospel, all, seem'd made to be disputed,
 And none had sense enough to be confuted:

Scotists and Thomists, now in peace remain,
 Amidst their kindred cobwebs in Duck-lane.
 If Faith itself has different dresses worn,
 What wonder modes in Wit should take their turn?

Off, leaving what is natural and fit,
 The current folly proves the ready wit;
 And authors think their reputation safe, 450
 Which lives as long as fools are pleas'd to laugh.

Some valuing those of their own side or mind
 Still make themselves the measure of mankind:
 Fondly we think we honour merit then,
 When we but praise ourselves in other men. 455

Parties in Wit attend on those of State,
 And public faction doubles private hate.
 Pride, Malice, Folly, against Dryden rose,
 In various shapes of Parsons, Critics, Beaus;
 But sense surviv'd when merry jests were past; 460
 For rising merit will buoy up at last.

Might he return, and bless once more our eyes,
 New Blackmores and new Milbourns must arise:

Nay should great Homer lift his awful head,
 Zoilus again would start up from the dead, 465
 Envy will merit, as its shade pursue;
 But like a shadow, proves the Substance true:
 For envy'd Wit, like Sol eclips'd, makes known
 Th' opposing body's grossness, not its own.
 When first that sun too pow'rful beams displays,
 It draws up vapours which obscure its rays; 471
 But ev'n those clouds at last adorn its way,
 Reflect new glories and augment the day.

Be thou the first true merit to befriend;
 His praise is lost, who stays 'till all commend. 475
 Short is the date, alas, of modern rhymes,
 And 'tis but just to let them live betimes,
 No longer now that golden age appears,
 When Patriarch wits surviv'd a thousand years:
 Now length of Fame (our second life) is lost, 480
 And bare threescore is all ev'n that can boast;
 Our sons their father's failing language see,
 And such as Chaucer is, shall Dryden be.
 So when the faithful pencil has design'd
 Some bright Idea of the master's mind, 485
 Where a new world leaps out at his command,
 And ready Nature waits upon his hand:
 When the ripe colours soften and unite,
 And sweetly melt into just shade and light;
 When mellowing years their full perfection give,
 And each bold figure just begins to live, 491
 The treach'rous colours the fair art betray,
 And all the bright creation fades away!

Unhappy Wit, like most mistaken things,
 Attunes not for that envy which it brings.
 In youth alone its empty praise we boast,
 But soon the short-liv'd vanity is lost:
 Like some fair flow'r the early spring supplies,
 That gayly blooms, but ev'n in blooming dies.
 What is this Wit, which must our cares employ?
 The owner's wife that other men enjoy; 501
 Then most our trouble still when most admir'd,
 And still the more we give, the more requir'd;
 Whose fame with pains we guard, but lose with ease,
 Sure some to vex, but never all to please; 505
 'Tis what the vicious fear, the virtuous shun,
 By fools 'tis hated, and by knaves undone!
 If Wit so much from Ign'rance undergo,
 Ah let not learning too commence its foe!
 Of old, those met rewards who could excell, 510
 And such were prais'd who but endeavour'd well:
 Tho' triumphs were to gen'als only due,
 Crowns were reserv'd to grace the soldiers too.
 Now, they who reach Parnassus' lofty crown,
 Employ their pains to spurn some others down; 515
 And while self-love each jealous writer rules,
 Contending wits become the sport of fools:
 But still the worst with most regret commend,
 For each ill Author is as bad a Friend.
 To what base ends, and by what abject ways, 520
 Are mortals urg'd thro' sacred lust of praise!
 Ah ne'er so dire a thirst of glory boast,
 Nor in the Critic let the Man be lost.

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21

Good-nature and good-sense must ever join;
To err is human, to forgive, divine.

525

But if in noble mind some dregs remain
Not yet purg'd off, of spleen and sour disdain;
Discharge that rage on more provoking crimes,
Nor fear a dearth in these flagitious times.

No pardon vile obscenity should find,

530

Tho' wit and art conspire to move your mind;

But Dulness with Obscenity must prove

As shameful sure as Impotence in love.

In the fat age of pleasure, wealth, and ease,

Sprung the rank weed, and thriv'd with large increase: 535

When love was all an easy Monarch's care;

Seldom at council, never in a war:

jilts rul'd the state, and statesmen farces writ;

Nay wits had pensions, and young Lords had wit:

The Fair sat panting at a Courtier's play,

540

And not a Mask went unimprov'd away:

The modest fan was lifted up no more,

And Virgins smil'd at what they blush'd before.

The following licence of a Foreign reign

Did all the dregs of bold Socinus drain;

545

Then unbelieving Priests reform'd the nation,

And taught more pleasant methods of salvation;

Where Heav'n's free subjects might their rights dispute,

Left God himself should seem too absolute:

Pulpits their sacred satire learn'd to spare,

550

And Vice admir'd to find a flatt'rer there!

Encourag'd thus, Wit's Titans brav'd the skies,

And the press groan'd with licens'd blasphemies.

These monsters, Critics! with your darts engage,
 Here point your thunder, and exhaust your rage!
 Yet shun their fault, who, scandalously nice, 556
 Will needs mistake an author into vice;
 All seems infected that th' infected spy,
 As all looks yellow to the jaundic'd eye. 559

LEARN then what MORALS Critics ought to show,
 For 'tis but half a judge's task, to know.
 'Tis not enough, taste, judgment, learning, join;
 In all you speak, let truth and candour shine:
 That not alone what to your sense is due
 All may allow; but seek your friendship too. 565

Be silent always, when you doubt your sense;
 And speak, tho' sure, with seeming diffidence:
 Some positive, persisting fops we know,
 Who if once wrong, will needs be always so;
 But you, with pleasure own your errors past, 570
 And make each day a Critique on the last.

'Tis not enough your counsel still be true;
 Blunt truths more mischief than nice falsehoods do;
 Men must be taught as if you taught them not,
 And things unknown propos'd as things forgot. 575
 Without Good-Breeding, truth is disapprov'd;
 That only makes superior sense belov'd.

Be niggards of advice on no pretence:
 For the worst avarice is that of sense.
 With mean complacence ne'er betray your trust, 580
 Nor be so civil as to prove unjust.
 Fear not the anger of the wise to raise;
 Those best can bear reproof, who merit praise.

'Twere well might Critics still this freedom take,
 But Appius reddens at each word you speak, 585
 And stares tremendous with a threat'ning eye,
 Like some fierce tyrant in old tapestry.
 Fear most to tax an honourable fool,
 Whose right it is, uncensur'd, to be dull;
 Such, without wit, are Poets when they please, 590
 As without learning they can take Degrees.
 Leave dang'rous truths to unsuccessful Satires,
 And flattery to fulsome Dedicators,
 Whom, when they praise, the world believes no more,
 Than when they promise to give scribbling o'er. 595
 'Tis best sometimes your censure to restrain,
 And charitably let the dull be vain:
 Your silence there is better than your spite,
 For who can rail so long as they can write?
 Still humming on, their drouzy course they keep, 600
 And lash'd so long, like tops, are lash'd asleep.
 False steps but help them to renew the race,
 As, after stumbling, jades will mend their pace.
 What crouds of these, impenitently bold,
 In sounds and jingling syllables grown old, 605
 Still run on Poets, in a raging vein,
 Ev'n to the dregs and squeezings of the brain,
 Strain out the last dull droppings of their sense,
 And rhyme with all the rage of impotence.

Such shameless Bards we have; and yet 'tis true,
 There are as mad, abandon'd Critics too. 611
 The bookful blockhead ignorantly read,
 With loads of learned lumber in his head,

With his own tongue still edifies his ears,
 And always list'ning to himself appears. 615
 All books he reads, and all he reads affails,
 From Dryden's Fables down to Durfey's Tales.
 With him most authors steal their works, or buy;
 Garth did not write his own Dispensary,
 Name a new Play, and he's the Poet's friend, 620
 Nay shew'd his faults --- but when would Poets mend?
 No place so sacred from such fops is barr'd,
 Nor is Paul's church more safe than Paul's church yard:
 Nay, fly to Altars; there they'll talk you dead;
 For Fools rush in where Angels fear to tread. 625
 Distrustful sense with modest caution speaks,
 It still looks home, and short excursions makes:
 But ratling nonsense in full vollies breaks,
 And never shock'd, and never turn'd aside,
 Burst out, resistless, with a thund'ring tide, 630
 But where's the man, who counsel can bestow,
 Still pleas'd to teach, and yet not proud to know?
 Unbias'd, or by favour, or by spite;
 Not dully prepossess'd, nor blindly right; 634
 Tho' learn'd, well-bred; and tho' well-bred, sincere;
 Modestly bold, and humanly severe;
 Who to a friend his faults can freely show,
 And gladly praise the merit of a foe?
 Blest with a taste exact, yet unconfin'd;
 A knowledge both of books and human kind? 640
 Gen'rous converse; a soul exempt from pride;
 And love to praise, with reason on his side;
 Such once were Critics; such the happy few,
 Athens

Athens and Rome in better ages knew.
The mighty Stagirite first left the shore, 645
Spread all his sails, and durst the deeps explore;
He steer'd securely, and discover'd far,
Led by the light of the Mæonian star.

Poets, a race long unconfin'd, and free,
Still fond and proud of savage liberty, 650
Receiv'd his laws; and stood convinc'd 'twas fit,
Who conquer'd Nature, should preside o'er wit.

Horace still charms with graceful negligence,
And without method talks us into sense,
Will, like a friend, familiarly convey 655
The truest notions in the easiest way.

He, who supreme in judgment, as in wit,
Might boldly censure, as he boldly writ,
Yet judg'd with coolness, tho' he sung with fire;
His Precepts teach but what his works inspire. 660

Our critics, take a contrary extreme,
They judge with fury, but they write with flegm:
Nor suffers Horace more in wrong Translations
By Wits, than Critics in as wrong Quotations.

See Dionysius Homer's thought refine, 665
And call new beauties forth from ev'ry line!

Fancy and art in gay Petronius please,
The scholar's learning, with the courtier's ease.

In grave Quintilian's copious work, we find
The justest rules, and clearest method join'd: 670
Thus useful arms in magazines we place,
All rang'd in order, and dispos'd with grace,
But less to please the eye, than arm the hand,

Still, fit for use, and ready at command.

Thee, bold Longinus! all the Nine inspire, 675
And bless their Critic with a Poet's fire.

An ardent Judge, who zealous in his trust,
With warmth gives sentence, yet is always just:
Whose own example strengthens all his laws;
And is himself that great Sublime he draws. 680

Thus long succeeding Critics justly reign'd,
Licence repress'd, and useful laws ordain'd.
Learning and Rome alike in empire grew;
And arts still follow'd where her eagles flew; 684
From the same foes, at last, both felt their doom,
And the same age saw Learning fall, and Rome,
With Tyranny, then Superstition join'd,
As that the body, this enslav'd the mind;
Much was believ'd, but little understood,
And to be dull was constru'd to be good; 690
A second deluge Learning thus o'er-run,
And the Monks finish'd what the Goths begun.

At length Erasmus, that great injur'd name,
(The glory of the Priesthood, and the shame!)
Stem'd the wild torrent of a barb'rous age, 695
And drove those holy Vandals off the stage.

But see! each Muse, in LEO's golden days,
Starts from her trance, and trims her wither'd bays,
Rome's ancient Genius, o'er its ruins spread,
Shakes off the dust, and rears his rev'rend head: 700
Then sculpture and her sister-arts revive;
Stones leap'd to form, and rocks began to live;
With sweeter notes each rising Temple rung;

A Ra-

A Raphael painted, and a Vida sung.

Immortal Vida: on whose honour'd brow 705

The Poet's bays and Critic's ivy grow:

Cremona now shall ever boast thy name,

As next in place to Mantua, next in fame!

But soon by impious arms from Latium chas'd,
Their ancient bounds the banish'd Muses pass'd; 710

Thence Arts o'er all the northern world advance,

But Critic learning flourish'd most in France;

The rules a nation, born to serve, obeys;

And Boileau still in right of Horace sways.

But we, brave Britons, foreign laws despis'd, 715

And kept unconquer'd and unciviliz'd;

Fierce for the liberties of wit, and bold,

We still defy'd the Romans, as of old.

Yet some there were, among the sounder few

Of those who less presum'd, and better knew, 720

Who durst assert the juster ancient cause,

And here restor'd Wit's fundamental laws.

Such was the Muse, whose rules and practice tell,

"Nature's chief Master-piece is writing well."

Such was Roscommon, not more learn'd than good,

With manners gen'rous as his noble blood; 726

To him the wit of Greece and Rome was known,

And ev'ry author's merit, but his own.

Such late was Walsb—the Muse's judge and friend,

Who justly knew to blame or to commend; 730

To failings mild, but zealous for desert;

The clearest head, and the sincerest heart.

This humble praise, lamented shade! receive,

This

ESSAY ON CRITICISM

This praise at least a grateful Muse may give: 734

The Muse whose early voice you taught to sing,
Prescrib'd her heights, and prun'd her tender wing,
(Her guide now lost) no more attempts to rise,
But in low numbers short excursion tries:

Content, if hence th' unlearn'd their wants may view,
The learn'd reflect on what before they knew: 740

Careless of censure, nor too fond of fame;
Still pleas'd to praise, yet not afraid to blame;
Averse alike to flatter, or offend;
Not free from faults, nor yet too vain to mend.



